

STRAFFORD MEETING HOUSE
On the Green, Town of Strafford
Orange County, Vermont

HABS No. VT. 36

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
120 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

STRAFFORD MEETING HOUSE

Location: On the Green, Town of Strafford, Orange County, Vermont.

Present Owner: Town of Strafford.

Present Occupant: Same as present owner.

Present Use: Town Meetings.

Brief Statement of Significance: The Meeting House is a well preserved, severe, wooden structure on an imposing site.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Town of Strafford.
2. Date of erection: 1799. The belfry and tower were added in 1832.
3. Architect, builder, suppliers, etc.: The architect is unknown. The builder, suppliers, etc., however, were local. In 1799 the exterior shell was paid for by a local tax and the interior was finished by the sale of pews.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: "square, flooded with light on all sides by a double row of windows, steep roof, a steeple towering to the skies - square pews, with seats surmounted by high balustrades, shutting families in so many pews - a lofty pulpit, with a sounding-board hanging over it - a heavy gallery, and the inevitable pen-shaped pews running around three sides of the upper story. . ." (Taken from an article by Senator Justin Smith Morrill of Strafford in Hemenway, The Vermont Historical Gazetteer, p.1062(2)).
5. Notes on alterations and additions: In 1832, additions were built by a local man named Martin Barret. The bell was cast in 1832 by George H. Holbrooke, Medway, Massachusetts (inscription cast in the bell). The exterior survives unaltered. The original high pulpit in the interior has been replaced by a stage and the box pews survive in a dilapidated condition, in the gallery only.

6. References

- a. Mr. George Bassingthwaighe, Assistant Town Clerk, Strafford, Vermont, who has carefully preserved town records relating to the building of the Meeting House, including the list of original pew subscribers.
- b. Abby Maria Hemenway, Editor, The Vermont Historical Gazetteer, Volume ii, Burlington, Vermont, 1871, pp. 1067(2)-1090.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure

This town meeting house was typically built to accommodate local civic and religious meetings and was made available to the various religious groups in town, according to a specified schedule. At the time of the disestablishment of the churches in Vermont in the 1820's and 1830's, most of the Meeting Houses passed into the possession of the churches. During a religious controversy in Strafford in the 1830's, however, both of the leading church groups built their own churches and as a result, this meeting house remained the property of the town of Strafford. It still serves as the Town Meeting House for this very small town.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby
November 1959

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Large, severely plain wooden Meeting House on an imposing site.
2. Condition of fabric: Exterior condition good and unaltered. Interior in disrepair, pulpit replaced by a stage but otherwise unaltered.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Main block approximately 45' x 60' plus entry vestibule rising to tower 15' x 15'.
2. Foundations: Cut granite.
3. Wall construction: Timber frame, clapboards.

VT
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1-

STRAFFORD MEETING HOUSE
Page 3

4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Cut granite entrance stoops.
5. Chimneys: 1 chimney toward rear.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: 5 doors on entrance facade - 6 panel doors. No ornament except moulded trim on center door only. Only center door used.
 - b. Windows and shutters: 20 light over 20 light double hung windows except tower with 12 over 12. 1 flat topped variant of Palladian window in tower. Centered on rear: one 20 over 20 with 1/2 circle round head plus circular window above.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, wood shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Simple boxed eaves.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas: 2 storied steeple comprising open belfry with George H. Holbrooke bell surmounted by a steeple and wrought iron weather vane.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Entry vestibule leads into single, large meeting room with gallery on three sides.
2. Stairways: Stairway in entry vestibule leads to gallery and tower.
3. Flooring: Wide Pine boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: 6 panel doors.
6. Trim: Simple moulded wood trim.
7. Hardware: Wrought iron.
8. Lighting: Electric.
9. Heating: Stoves.

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STRAFFORD MEETING HOUSE
Page 4

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Faces South. Stands on a 50' high hill or mound at the end of the village green.
2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Landscaping, gardens, etc.: Informal: lawn, trees.

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ADDENDUM TO:
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Vermont

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001